

THE NEW COURSE FOR THE IS

December 8, 1976

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Dear Comrades,

We are submitting this document to the organization today because we believe the IS is in a deep crisis. The organization's perspectives have failed. The organization's politics and policies are shifting to the right. Good comrades are quitting. There is widespread demoralization. We cannot afford to wait until the convention. To do so would be irresponsible.

We want and demand all the democratic rights that are entitled to a faction in a revolutionary Marxist organization--the fundamental right to put forward and fight for our perspectives. The right to use the internal publications of the organization. The right to use the equipment of the organization. We have a right to a share of the financial resources, just as the supporters of the "Build a Workers' Leadership" at last summer's convention had theirs.

We ask that all branches discuss this document. We will be happy to send speakers to any branch. We will insist that all the issues be fully discussed, including the Sadlowski campaign, which is central to the debate on "mass work." We will also insist that the entire membership be involved in the debate and in its resolution. In particular, we do not believe an NC debate to be sufficient, nor do we consider the present NC to be particularly representative.

We have organized the Left Faction because we believe only a full and organized discussion can lead to a successful conclusion. Any other course would only have made a real debate less likely. Already, the EC is attempting to severely limit the debate--now to a little more than a month's time (January 30), and excluding the issue of the Sadlowski campaign. We will not accept these limitations. To do so would also be irresponsible.

We ask all the members of the IS to read our document, to discuss it with us, and to join us. We are attaching a partial list of endorsers.

In struggle,

The Left Faction

THE LEFT FACTIONAtlanta

Belinda H.
Todd J.

Bloomington

Bruce B.
Milt F.
Tim F.

Chicago

Johnny S.
Ron W.

Cincinnati

Anna F.
Bill R.
Deborah R.
Ellen D.
Ed W.
Judy N.
Michael L.
Tom H.

Cleveland

Anne M.
Betsey L.
Celia D.F.
Dan P.
Doug P.

Detroit

Barbara W.
Cal W.
Jenny V.
Patricia G.

Gary

Ben B.
Maggie M.
Nadie S.
Pat M.
Sharon F.
Sandy G.
Tom S.

Indianapolis

Clem W.
Jim N.
John T.
Kathy W.

Los Angeles

David L.

Louisville

Christina B.
Bonni B.
Fred H.
John E.
Sue B.

Madison

Bob G.

Portland

David H.
David S.
Gloria F.
Jackie S.
John M.
John R.
Steve P.

Seattle

Diane E.
Donna B.
Gretchen E.
John W.
Judy F.
Mike G.
Scott W.
Sheila M.
Shelly C.
Steve L.

INTRODUCTION

Today, there is every reason for revolutionary socialists to be confident. Internationally, the working class continues to move to the center of the stage--in Portugal, increasingly in Spain, now in Southern Africa..

In the United States, the crisis of capitalism has developed more slowly, nevertheless it continues daily to erode the confidence of the American people. Every day capitalism is less viable for the working class and the poor, and the question of an alternative system is pushed to the fore.

The key to this period is still, of course, to be found in the post-war boom, in particular in the role played by arms expenditures, and in the contradictions which are bringing the period to an end. The business cycle has returned, and for the first time in a generation, there is the prospect of long-term stagnation and decline in the American economy. The immediate future promises only weaker booms, followed by deeper recessions.. Today, even in the midst of a "boom," there is talk of a "recession within the boom." At the same time, there are predictions of a new world recession within the next two years.

Still, the United States remains by far the richest and most powerful nation with thick layers of fat. In fact, its position in relation to its competitors has been strengthened in the past five years. This has been accomplished by devaluation, by a massive productivity drive, by reducing the real wages and living standards of American workers, by slashing public expenditures (services), and by maintaining, according to AFL-CIO figures, unemployment above 10%..

This "solution" has had its price, however. Today, the decline in the living standards of American workers, together with the crisis in the cities and public services, and also with the legacy of Viet Nam and Watergate, has left a vast disillusion in the economic and political system. Apathy, of course, still reigns, but today even apathy is being shaken.

We have always known that American workers would fight back, and indeed they have. Still, we recognize that the present strength of American capitalism is in part related to the weakness of the workers' resistance. Beginning with Nixon's wage freeze, including the last two years' productivity drives and the vicious attacks on city workers, the ruling class offensive has largely been successful. Where there has been resistance, it has been fragmented, isolated, uneven. Certainly, with the exception of the miners, there has been no consistent response, no pattern.. There have been fewer strikes this year than last.

Nevertheless, there have been struggles, including fantastic explosions of working class militancy--in the miners' wildcats, in the truckers' blockades, and in the San Francisco city workers general strike. There was the long, bitter rubber workers strike. IS members were involved in strikes in the car haulers, in freight and in UPS. And increasingly, there are strikes by teachers, nurses, hospital workers. Working class resistance is developing more slowly than we might like, but it is there.

The problem is this: While there is great potential, the IS is not able to take advantage. At a time when our ideas ought to be more relevant than ever before, when there are real openings in which socialists can intervene, the IS is declining and thoroughly demoralized. The majority of the membership has little confidence in either the organization or its perspectives. The newspaper, Workers' Power, is hardly sold. There has been a sharp decline in the political level of the group. Internally, the IS is wracked with dissension, including strong conservative tendencies. Needless to say, the possibilities pass us by.

THE "TURN"

Promises...

"A political party's attitude towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it fulfills in practice its obligations towards its class and the working people. Frankly acknowledging a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analysing the conditions that have led up to it, and thrashing out the means of its rectification--that is the hallmark of a serious party; that is how it should perform its duties, and how it should educate and train its class, and then the masses. (Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism, emphasis in original)

To understand the situation in the IS today, it is necessary to look back to the original perspectives of the organization, in this case the resolutions and proposals planned for and passed by the 1975 convention. Glenn Wolfe, one of the architects of the "Turn to Agitation," as well as the "Bolshevization of the IS" has reminded us, "We got to where we are because we had a conscious strategy of using our limited resources in a consistent way, at the points where revolutionary politics could have the greatest effect on the working class as a whole, in auto, steel, mines, communications, and transport." (ISJ #88, emphasis added)

The conscious strategy was summarized in the IS pamphlet, "The Struggle for Workers' Power" (Detroit, 1975) which spelled

out the perspectives of the IS, in particular in the 1976-1977 bargaining round.

"It is in this three-year period that we will become a workers' combat group in the lead of a growing rank and file movement, or be set back severely.

"The core group of the new revolutionary working class political leaders will have to be recruited to the IS during this period and be rapidly prepared to assume political roles.

"By three years from now we want them [the workers] to be the leadership of the IS, a working class and black leadership, which has already started the process of constructing factory branches.

"We want to double our membership by the next convention [1976]. In the next 2-3 years, we want to have the core of a party--worker cadres, factory branches, national rank and file movements, a weekly paper, a theoretical journal, a strong youth group, and a working class and black leadership."

...And Results

The results, unfortunately, have been somewhat different. In auto, in particular in Detroit, where the IS has concentrated its resources, both human and material, for some six years now, there was this year an unqualified defeat. According to the new "Draft National Auto Fraction Perspective," (October 27, 1976), "We recruited and held no one from the plants in the past nine months. In the same period we lost a number of members." And: "The extremely low returns for huge amounts of work in the contract campaign has resulted in large-scale feelings of burnout and demoralization in the fraction."

In CWA, another priority of the IS for the past six years, there is even a question as to whether there can be any contract campaign in 1977. A letter to "dissident" local union presidents proposing joint activity on the contract received not a single response. Membership in the fraction has declined, and there is deep demoralization and confusion among those who carry on.

In the steelworkers, the IS is in the midst of a campaign of "unconditional" support for Ed Sadlowski, a leftish bureaucrat from Chicago. Independent rank and file activity has been "dissolved" into this campaign, and with no forces of our own, we have become "the best fighters, the best organizers" for Sadlowski. There is dissension in the fraction.

The West Virginia UMW perspective was abandoned altogether.

One Success

There has been, on the other hand, one success: the Teamster work. This included playing a part in forcing the national freight strike, the UPS strikes, and the building of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), a small, but very promising rank and file organization. I.S. members also edit the two influential rank and file Teamster newspapers, Convoy and UPSurge. Several Teamsters joined the I.S.

There are problems here as well, however. In the words of one N.C. member, referring to the freight campaign, "Another success like this will kill us." There is of course more than an ounce of truth in this. The Teamster campaign contributed, as the national leadership itself has said, to the "liquidation" of the I.S. for a prolonged period of time. It contributed to the actual loss of many members, members not directly involved in the Teamsters, including the vast majority of new worker members recruited in the preceeding years' recruitment campaign. It contributed to the decline of Workers' Power, both politically and in circulation. Finally, it left the organization exhausted, demoralized, and isolated, after its "greatest success."

There was a greater problem as well, for it was during the course of this campaign that the I.S. began to loose its political perspectives. "Mass Work" and "Transitional Politics" were discovered as the "lessons of the TDC." The conservative opposition of the 1976 convention also based itself on the "lessons of the TDC."

The Teamster campaigns were also, of course, real successes in the trade union movement, and there has been a great deal of discussion of this. Today, however, it is more important to realistically evaluate even the Teamster work, especially as it is sometimes said in the organization that TDU represents the "greatest achievement in the American labor movement in thirty years." Surely, this is not true, and in fact it is a claim just as dangerous as earlier projections that 1976 would be the I.S.'s "Minneapolis" and that the TDC had "chapters in almost 50 cities...is a force in hundreds of union branches, and... has a weekly paper with a circulation of over 30,000." (GW ISJ 88)

Lenin said, "tell the truth to the workers" and this must hold for successes as well as failures.

Finally, it should also be added that in this period covered by the EC's "2½ year Perspective" the IS has abandoned its Philadelphia and Sacramento branches, and it is possible that other branches may yet be lost. At the same time, and connected with these perspectives, I.S. internal life has become increasingly nightmareish with branch after branch torn apart in internal conflict, terminated only by the shuffling and reshuffling of members, and, of course, "discipline." More and more the organ-

ization takes on the characteristics of a "sect" in its isolated existence, its frenzied activity, its endless internal meetings, its big talk, to no listeners.

A NEW COURSE

In short, then, the perspectives of the I.S. have failed. The promises of the I.S. leadership have proved false, despite the claims that "we were right" on everything, and the assurances that "we would do it all again." The I.S. today, far from being a "workers combat organization" is a middle class sect drifting to the right.

Consequently, it is time for a new course, a left course. We call ourselves the Left Faction, not out of posturing (we come from all sides of previous debates), but because the present leadership is steering the I.S. dangerously to the right. We remain committed to building a rank and file movement, independent of the trade union bureaucracy and the state, and a genuine revolutionary workers organization - an organization with an uncompromising commitment to the struggles of the oppressed: blacks, women, the minorities. This organization will be built on the self-activity of the working class itself, not on the grand schemes (and illusions) of the present leadership, or any other.

The road ahead will not be smooth and there is no point in making big promises. As Marx told revolutionaries who flattered German workers in his time: "While we say to the workers: you have 15 or 20 years of bourgeois and national wars to go through, not merely to alter conditions, but to alter yourselves and make yourselves fit to take political power, you tell them on the contrary that they must take over political power at once or abandon all hope." We are very small. We still face the long haul. We can only begin by facing reality.

MASS WORK

"Mass work" is now the name for all our work. It is the I.S. strategy for everything from the Sadlowski campaign in the steelworkers, to a campaign protesting leaking roofs at Chevy Gear and Axle. It is also "our method" in the Gary Tyler work. It can mean anything, and everything.

On the surface, of course, the concept "mass work" is ridiculous. Where, after all, are the masses? Still, we should look at the actual practice, and since it is not possible to deal with every campaign, we will begin with just two: auto and steel.

Auto

Here is the auto fraction's evaluation of the Coalition

for a Good Contract (CGC) and its work in the period of the 1976 auto contract negotiations (quotes from "Evaluation of Campaign Around Auto Contract," Auto Fraction Steering Committee, Sept. 30, 1976):

"The CGC was the right way to go, not only because it reflected our "mass work" strategy which we know to be right in theory and proven in practice.. But it also fitted the particular industry...

"We have sustained a net loss in members and the ones we still have are understandably demoralized. That we have not lost more is a tribute to the toughness of our basic cadre in the auto industry.

"We are firmly convinced that it was correct to try a major initiative around this contract and that the CGC was the right form for that initiative. If we are starting over there are obvious mistakes we would not make again, but the essence of our intervention would be the same."

Forgetting for the moment the double talk "which we know to be right in theory and proven in practice," this evaluation might be just another obituary for Detroit auto work, with mass work for the IS printer, and no rewards.

Nevertheless, there was a difference this year, and "mass work" was that difference. When the National Secretary announced at the auto fraction during the National Convention that the IS might find itself supporting Doug Fraser, many members were shocked. Doug Fraser, an International Vice President of the UAW, was the very man who led the union goon squad against rank and file wild-cat strikers at Detroit's Jefferson Assembly and Mack Avenue Chrysler plants.

The IS is not yet campaigning for Doug Fraser. However, it promoted Bob Weissman, the President of UAW Local 122 at Chrysler's Twinsburg, Ohio, stamping plant. Weissman is a long-time activist in Local 122, though he has not worked in the plant in 20 years. He is also active in Cleveland city politics. Recently, he was Republican Mayor Ralph Perk's chief labor advisor. (Perk is a racist and a reactionary who, among other things, led the anti-abortion forces at last summer's Republican Convention.)

The IS pushed Weissman as a leader of the CGC, and paid for and organized the CGC Detroit rally, which featured Weissman just before the contract expired. (There were no IS speakers at the meeting.)

Workers' Power recently featured without comment an interview with Weissman (Nov. 8, 1976), in which he bragged that "a strike at our plant would shut the corporation down within a week. When there actually was a strike at the Twinsburg plant, led apparently by a number of young workers infuriated by the Chrysler settlement, Weissman's talk was somewhat different. He joined with the company to break the strike, and publicly denounced the

strikers, promising he would see to it they didn't get their jobs back.

This certainly is "getting our hands dirty." (Interim Perspectives, EC, April 16, 1976) No doubt rank and file IS members worked hard to get production workers involved in the CGC. The fact is, however, that "mass work" in the UAW this year meant discarding "class struggle unionism" with a vengeance, promoting types like Weissman, and also tagging after almost every opportunist that moved, including UAW officials Runnels and Oginski, who twice last summer paraded retirees outside UAW meetings in downtown Detroit (and received glowing coverage in Workers' Power). These opportunists would never dare mobilize production workers.

Steel

Today, the IS is campaigning for Ed Sadlowski, the reform candidate for International President of the United Steel Workers. IS members now staff offices, hand out leaflets, organize dances and attend smorgasbords, all to prove themselves "hard-working, practical campaign workers"--the precondition, it is said, for political influence which is hoped to follow.

At the same time, it is IS policy "in each mill...to fold our existing work into the Fight Back movement." (Steel Perspectives) That is "mass work" terminology for dissolving the existing rank and file organizations into Sadlowski's official campaign--the Fight Back. We have even gone so far as to condemn the Communist Party as "sectarian" because they will not disband their steel workers newspaper. In this case, then, "mass work" puts us somewhere to the right of the Communist Party. Finally, women steel workers are now told that the best thing they can do for themselves "as women" is to support Sadlowski, and that an independent women's group, for example, would not do.

Sادلowski, of course, is far better than his opponent, Lloyd McBride, and far better than the current President I. W. Abel, the author of the union's no-strike pledge (the ENA). And he deserves support, though hardly "unconditional support," not to praise Workers' Power lavishes on him. He is still a bureaucrat, though a reforming, left one. His faults are not simply, as Workers' Power would have us believe, that he is "vague," "cautious," and has a shortage of "boldness and daring" (W.P., Nov. 29, 1976). Sadlowski is by no means a Debs, nor is he a "class struggle unionist." When steel workers at Danly Machine in Chicago were on strike for thirteen weeks, there were many militant battles on the picket lines. Ed Sadlowski however, their District Director, never once visited the lines.

Orientation to Left Bureaucracy

"Mass Work" then, has become the name for the IS's orientation to opportunists and reformers in the trade union bureau-

cracy. In the CWA, so far, the local union presidents have not nibbled at the IS proposal for joint work around the next contract. In the Teamsters, there has been a longstanding commitment to building an independent rank and file organization, and the TDU at this point promotes no bureaucrats. Still, given "mass work", there is the worry that when the inevitable Arnold Miller or Ed Sadlowski of the Teamsters comes along, there may be a proposal to "fold" the TDU into that campaign.

MILITANT MINORITY

What characterizes mass work is that on the issues we seek support from the mass of the workers involved, not just from a self-defined radicalized or militant minority. . .

In mass work on shop and economic issues, we try to give a lead to the backward, reactionary, and cowardly workers as well as . . . to the militants.
("Mass Work, Politics, Building the Party" EC document.)

Revolutionaries, of course, fight on partial and immediate demands. There is no place for purism, nor for abstentionists. Revolutionaries are also not program polishers, either of the 1938 Transitional Program variety, or of the "Principles of Class Struggle Unionism." Workers become revolutionaries in struggle, including of course the struggle over ideas.

The question, therefore, is really one of strategy and orientation. In the 1976 Detroit freight wildcat, a small, militant minority of Teamsters kept the strike going for three days after Frank Fitzsimmons ordered the members back to work. In the central states UPS strike, again, it was a small, militant minority that kept the pickets up an extra day in the wildcat that hit eight cities. Today, the TDU represents a small, politically conscious, militant minority of the 2 million strong Teamsters union.

Our orientation must be to that minority. Furthermore, there are great dangers in supposing that revolutionaries will lead the "reactionaries," including the racists and the sexists." It is the danger that the revolutionaries will be forced to accommodate to the "reactionaries" they must try to win. Already, we have seen that it is very difficult to get a plank supporting the United Farmworkers into the TDU program. Already, the IS has insisted that there can be no special demands for blacks and women in the "broad, mass campaigns" that it organizes.

The hard truth is that the IS cannot have it all ways. It cannot, at the same time, orient to the left bureaucracy, and to the "cowards and reactionaries" in the rank and file, and also to the militant minority, in particular to the special demands and struggles of the oppressed. There remains, of course, a rhetorical

commitment to blacks and women, but it is the "mass work" perspective itself, and not the intentions of its authors, that leads to abandoning in fact the orientation to blacks in industry; and that makes "mass work" a disaster for the fight for women's liberation in industry.

The fact is also that IS members cannot be the "best fighters, the best leaders," etc., without reflecting the politics of the class. If the class is conservative, the leaders quite naturally will reflect that conservatism. Whether we like it or not, the masses of workers in the United States today are quite conservative, in particular, they are filled with chauvinism: racism, sexism, patriotism. There is also of course a minority which is the opposite. The "mass work" approach however, orients to the former and strengthens the conservative tendencies already strong in our industrial work.

PRIORITIES

"Substitutionism is the greatest danger which faces a small revolutionary group." - Tony Cliff

There is a degree to which "mass work" is the logical conclusion of priorities. Both strategies are based fundamentally on the idea that revolutionaries can ignore the real facts of the world - the level of consciousness of the workers, the actual balance of forces in the particular plants, shops, and unions; in short, the objective conditions. In both strategies, the will of the revolutionaries (voluntarism) is substituted for the real struggles of the workers.

It is claimed, for example, that the present condition of the IS is not due to the politics or the perspectives of the EC:

"The flaws that are now revealed in our industrial mass work are not due to a failure of the mass work strategy, thought it still has some weaknesses, or simply to more difficult conditions resulting from the success of the employers offensive. Nor are they due to differences in the combativity at this time of workers in different industries because of specific differences in work force contracts, unions, conditions, etc. They are related to the fact that the IS political cadre is too small to lead the next steps forward..." (Campaign to Build a Political Periphery, EC, September 14, 1976, emphasis added)

The objective conditions don't count for much, thus it becomes the fault or short comings of the members; a voluntarist load that has crushed many fine comrades.

Similarly, the CGC was "the right way to go," it "fitted the particular industry," and we would do it again. Why then, did the CGC fail? Perhaps it was the workers' fault. Or possibly

if we had just had a few people in Ford...

What the Priorities Argument is Not About

At the beginning, something should be said about what the priorities argument is not about. Of course, all organizations have their priorities. So do branches, fractions, even individual members. And the priorities are probably determined by various factors - objective conditions, resources, openings for actual intervention and work. In 1973 for example, the British IS embarked upon a campaign to build factory branches, and there was in fact a policy by which other work was subordinated to that campaign. Never however were students told to leave the campuses to build factory branches, nor were white collar workers advised to get into the "priority" plant. And in summer, 1976, building factory branches was not a priority, not because of any abstract position on factory branches, but because of the objective conditions. There have also however been periods when recruiting students was a priority of the British IS. The Coventry branch has always made Socialist Worker sales and, whenever possible, agitation at Chrysler a priority. In Gary, Ind., steel will probably always be a priority for revolutionaries. In Danville, W. Va., coal mining.

Basic Industry

At the same time, all Marxists understand the importance of the factories and of basic industry. That is where capital is the most concentrated. That is where the workers are forced together, to work and work together in large numbers. It is also understood that on the day of the revolution, the "big battalions" had better be on the barricades - the auto workers, the steel workers, the coal miners and truck drivers.

The argument is not with the principle of revolutionaries that "every factory must be our fortress." Nor is it with the fact that industrial workers must be the key to building a successful revolutionary workers' party. So it is stupid to attempt to reduce the question to one of white collar vs. blue collar or workers vs. students. The argument concerns the question of how to build a proletarian party, not whether a proletarian party is desired.

Unrealistic Priorities

The argument is also not that Detroit IS should ignore the auto plants and workers who dominate the city's workforce. Rather, it is that the present IS strategy makes it impossible for New York IS to relate to city workers, and forgets the fact that New York City has no auto at all, and relatively little basic industry. The problem is also that the IS strategy of priorities makes it impossible for Louisville IS to relate to a teachers strike. Boston IS must ignore students. Women IS members cannot relate to the struggles of women workers. The

IS as an organization could not relate to the rubber workers strike. The problem is that the IS strategy of priorities creates a rigid organization, with increasingly narrow perspectives.

No Grand Schemes

"In Connolly's words, 'The only true prophets are those who carve out the future they announce.' At the same time, mindless adoption of 'Bolshevik' solutions that fitted a genuinely revolutionary situation would be fatal, not because of any desire of Marxists to avoid questions of the seizure of state power, but because we work with the movement as it is and not as it might be.

"The richest source for the development of Marxist theory is the experience of the working class; to impose grand conceptions on a movement that is fragmented and very narrow in its contemporary focus is both to miss the opportunity for the recreation of theory and in practice to become isolated and sectarian."
(Colin Barker, "The British Labor Movement," ISJ # 61)

The American working class is no more monolithic than the British, the Portuguese, or whatever. The path to socialism cannot be charted or "planned." Today there is very little "consistency" in the class struggle. American workers struggle, but their struggles are fragmented and sporadic. Certainly, there is no way that a group of 300 can either chart the course of the class struggle, nor can it expect to impose "consistency" on history. A glance at working class history shows that the great explosions are rarely predicted. The women began the Russian Revolution. Portuguese teachers were the first ones out in the latest resurgence of Portuguese workers. Coal miners in the United States today are the most anti-communist workers. The first ones today will later be the last. All the planning of the IS EC, all its expert deliberations, were not sufficient to predict that the 1976 auto strike would be at Ford, and consequently, in the words of the National Secretary, when the strike at Ford began, "the IS was as useless as a third tit."

The task of revolutionaries today is to take advantage of what actually exists, to build on the real struggles of the working class, not to pretend to plan the development of the struggle by choosing the three or four priority industries. Our task in the IS today is not to replace the present priorities with new ones, whether white collar, hospitals, or whatever. We must prepare ourselves to intervene, to "give a lead," in the struggles to come, including in the inevitable explosions that will come in auto.

Preparing ourselves politically and organizationally, however is not the same thing as trying to substitute ourselves for such explosions. As we have seen for some six years now, the IS

has not been able to take advantage of its work in auto. The abstract fact that auto workers are potentially the vanguard of the American working class has done very little to help the Detroit IS. The district is almost always in crisis, it is "reorganized" twice a year, with more or less the same members shuffled and reshuffled, from branch to branch, committee to committee. Still, the Detroit district is among the most isolated, the most conservative, the most apolitical district with little or no "consistent work." And this is despite the fact that Detroit has been and remains, the priority branch.

IS branches come and go, as do the members. "Priorities" led to scrapping the Philadelphia branch, nevermind the fact that it is a city of 5 million, and 600,000 blacks. There are today half a dozen or more second class (non-priority) branches. Right now, New York City is being written off once again, as if we believed there are no revolutionaries in New York's huge working class--and in capitalism's most important city.

Priorities In Priorities

The situation today might not even be quite so bad if the IS did in fact do consistent work in five major unions. But the truth is that even within the priorities, there are priorities. In the Teamsters, the priority is freight, and everything else must take a back seat. In auto, the priority is the Big Three (GM, Chrysler, Ford); in steel it is basic steel; in telephone it is plant. The IS prioritizes 95% of the working class out of its perspectives, and out of playing any part in this key two and one-half year period, during which, of course, "the core group of the new revolutionary working class political leaders will have to be recruited to the IS."

The IS must say to an electrical worker in Cincinnati, "you don't fit in." It must say to Louisville's fifteen new recruits last fall, "you don't fit in." Obviously there is little room or role for a teacher or a student. And what about black youth? How are these young people to find a role in our priorities when they face 50% unemployment?

Priorities are a disaster for work among the oppressed. It should not surprise us that the IS, with few exceptions, has virtually no women contacts in its industrial work. There are few women to be found in the priorities, and the work of the women in these industries, no matter how "magnificent" and heroic (which it often has been) can not be expected to change that objective fact.

Every Revolutionary a Priority

The advice then, of our British comrades concerning the divisions that now exist in our branches and between our branches divisions between industrialized members and non-industrialized

members, between industrial branches and "backward" branches, must be seen in this context. Rather than singling out that "good quarter of our organization" etc., and constantly referring to those "backward elements who don't fit in," we might consider their experience(ISGB): "...in twentyfive years of our existence, we have learnt that you have to count members in hundreds and thousands before the national leadership can begin to forget that every individual revolutionary, warts and all, is a 'priority.'" (ISGB Central Committee, "Letter to ISUS NC," Oct 7, 1976)

INDUSTRIALIZATION

"No matter how talented and devoted to socialism an emigrant from the bourgeois milieu may be, before becoming a teacher, he must first go to school in the working class. Young intellectuals must not be placed at the head of intellectual youth but sent out into the provinces for a few years, into purely proletarian centers, for hard practical work." (Trotsky, "Letter to Burnham," In Defense of Marxism)

In 1969, the IS began the policy of industrialization, that is, of sending students and former students into industry. In the beginning, only a few actually took industrial jobs, but eventually the organization moved toward wholesale industrialization and "industrializing the organization."

The policy, at least at first, was simple enough. A whole generation of revolutionaries had developed in the United States, without any connection to the working class. The IS therefore revived Trotsky's advice to Burnham, first so that IS members could gain some experience in the working class, and second so that socialist ideas could be taken back into the working class. Also hopefully so that workers could be recruited and the actual social composition of the IS changed.

The fact was that often the best and most committed students chose to take industrial jobs, sometimes because of the frustrations of student politics, but usually because of their commitment to the working class and to transforming the IS. In many cases, this is still true today.

Reasons to Industrialize

The IS was not the only organization to industrialize - the Maoist groups did the same, as did dozens of new-left collectives. The arguments for industrialization in the IS, however, were particularly strong. In the sixties, the IS (actually the ISC) resided in Berkeley, not exactly a working class stronghold. Its ties to the past were few, if any. The active leadership of the IS had no experience in the working class at all. There were virtually no workers in the organization. Finally, the IS did not have a useful newspaper, and neither did it have any idea of

how to develop a workers' paper.

Therefore it can be said that industrialization offered certain advantages, and that it was at least symbolic of the organization's commitment to the working class.

Problems of Industrialization

Unfortunately, industrialization brought many problems as well, problems not discussed in Trotsky's letter. The middle class students who went into industry nearly always immediately faced severe problems, in adjusting to the work, to the workers, and so on. Problems which could be chalked up to experience for Trotsky's youth, came to dominate the IS, for in the IS not just a few "went off to school." The IS was organized to revolve around the industrialized members.

The industrialized students also faced political problems at work. They found themselves aliens in the working class world, facing a difficult struggle just to fit in, to be accepted. Fitting in usually involved politically accommodating to the conservative politics of the majority of the workers - and, that meant putting revolutionary politics on the shelf, at least for a considerable period.

The results, for most of the students involved, were profoundly conservatizing. Above all, they needed to break out of their isolation, yet their politics seemed only to make them stand out even more. Mass work, of course, helped in that it made accommodation somewhat simpler, at least politically.

Worse, instead of what Trotsky had advised as a three year course, industrialization often became a whole personal strategy for those comrades involved. The industrialized comrades found themselves with a role and place assured in the organization. Increasingly, they came to think of themselves not as a human link to workers, but as actual workers. And industrialization became a substitute for recruiting real workers.

The "Failures"

The very worst came when middle class members of the IS were told not only that they had to industrialize, but that they were to become mass workers' leaders as well - and overnight. There are exceptions to every rule of course, but in general, the "you can lead" syndrome guaranteed "mass" casualties. Those comrades who attempted to do the impossible - to stand out and fight, and lead the masses, were often victimized. The others more than likely "failed." No wonder. The idea that middle class students, with little or no experience, with little or no seniority can expect to be mass leaders is simply ludicrous, and of course the IS leaves behind it a long trail of "failures."

Industrialization was also justified in the beginning by

American exceptionalism, yet now it is becoming a principle of revolutionary organization. The IS EC wants to convince not only the Canadians and the Australians of its necessity, but also the Germans and the Irish. It even hints that the British IS should industrialize. The British comrades can hardly be blamed, therefore, if they believe the leadership here does in fact "live in a fantasy world."

Industrialization conservatizes the individual members, and leads to conservatism in the entire organization. It focuses the attention of the organization not on the working class, but on its own middle class members. And, in the last analysis, it has not even helped us to recruit, with the possible exception of the Teamster work. On the contrary, it may well be a factor in keeping workers away.

Whatever the advantages of industrialization in the past, industrialization today is clearly a disadvantage. No, we do not propose dragging comrades from their jobs, and there may still be many contributions to be made by industrialized members. But industrialization as a strategy must be abandoned. It is a pessimistic, conservative and substitutionist strategy.

Finally, industrialization as practiced today by the IS, or by the Maoists for that matter, has nothing in common with Trotsky's "going to school in the working class." It has become a road not to a genuine workers' organization, but instead to a petty bourgeois workerist organization.

THE REGIME

"When we open up a new area of work - for example our Free Gary Tyler campaign - we don't dabble." (EC Letter to British IS, October 15, 1976)

The IS today is a wreck. It is a schizophrenic organization, conservative in its industrial work, yet full of bluster - "We are the best fighters," "we have left the world of the sects," we are "building the party."

Failure has followed failure, promise after promise has gone unfulfilled. Still, the leadership attempts to maintain that everything is basically sound. It's simply a "bad period." In the meantime, "discipline" substitutes for real leadership, even though, of course, there is only the most formal and passive agreement on perspectives - in the face of "no alternative." "Discipline" and "following orders" is demanded in an admittedly "apolitical" organization.

The "machine" in Detroit substitutes for strong branches and fractions. Today, one member in ten in the IS works fulltime for the organization. New offices are regularly opened, new posts invented. It is all, of course, a far cry from an actual "Bolshev

organization:

The Bolshevik administrative center was the most primitive. There were only three people in the secretariat during the 1905 revolution. This penny ha'penny apparatus, together with conditions of illegality and the proletarian composition of the party, made it impossible for petty-bourgeois factionalism to develop. The party member was expected to participate in determining the general line of the party and to know the specific job he himself was to do. There was no place for the intense gossip group." (Tony Cliff, "Lenin and the Revolutionary Party" ISJ, #58)

Voluntarism

The IS today is a sect, dominated by voluntarism. Consider this statement:

// "A good quarter of our membership is solidly enough committed to put their whole life at the service organization. These are comrades who, at the request of the organization, will pull up roots, break ties with family and friends, leave well paid jobs to move to the place where we need them, work in the industry we ask them to, and live in poverty as long as required". (EC letter to British IS, October 15, 1976)

It is a description of a stereotypical sect. It has more in common with the middle-class collectives of the new left than it does with Marxist tradition.

IS members are very dedicated. Comrades have moved and moved again. Comrades have taken jobs in steel and teamsters. Middle-class revolutionaries in particular should be expected to sacrifice. But none of this is the meaning of the EC's statement.

A Real Workers Organization

Today, the IS needs, more than anything else, roots, stability, and continuity. It needs to break out of its isolation. It needs to recruit and integrate workers. It needs to be an organization "habitable" to workers. Can anyone really believe that today, workers will join (and stay in) an organization that expects them to "pull up roots", "break with family and friends", and "live in poverty", not to mention attend an endless series of internal - and often pointless - meetings? Most workers, of course must struggle just to stay out of poverty (or are struggling to get out of poverty). Most workers must struggle just to hold things together - including family and friends.

The EC formula has nothing to do with building a real workers organization, with developing a real workers leadership so no wonder relies instead on tokenism.

The IS in fact has recruited a small number of workers. The record of holding them and training them, however, is appalling, surely a bad sign in a period where revolutionary workers are relatively few in numbers.

Blacks

The IS has also recruited a small number of blacks. Yet, it has discouraged a genuine black leadership. Black members are dragged from city to city to speak, but they are not developed to become active leaders. Still, the IS claims the title "best fighters for black liberation." Despite our proclamations, the IS has taken on the very worst traditions of the left in its black work. It is full of rhetoric: "we will rebuild the black movement;" the merger with the Socialist Collective was "an historic occasion" and "the world will be watching us." (EC Statement on Unity Fall '74) Yet it does not even politically and organizationally train those few blacks who do join. The truth is that the IS has no ongoing black work, it has no black perspectives, not even for local work. It flits from issue to issue. The EC has failed to raise black liberation in any consistent way in our trade union work. The record of the leadership on black work is tokenism, opportunism, and self-congratulations.

Discipline

"Politics is 99% inspiration and 1% discipline." (Lenin)

"Discipline" today substitutes for political agreement. And there is very little inspiration. If comrades cannot be convinced, as is often the case, they are threatened - with suspension, expulsion, and "we'll destroy you." Yet everyone knows there is no democracy in the IS, and when there is a genuine controversy the leadership attempts to suppress it: it muzzles dissenting speakers, it will not order or distribute certain materials; it "loses" correspondence, and it fails to disseminate documents submitted by its membership.

The leadership, instead of striving to build a real cadre organization - an organization in which the members are politically confident, full of initiative, and self reliant - substitutes itself in every area. It is behind nearly every slate, no matter the branch or fraction. It is involved in never ending branch reorganizations and settlements. This past summer, there were three EC members on the auto fraction steering committee, though none of them of course, worked in auto. Today on the National CWA Fraction Steering Committee there are two EC members (out of four on the committee) and no phone workers. The National Chairman boasts to have led the Central States UPS strike. No wonder, then, that the membership is increasingly alienated and passive, that it has little confidence in the perspectives of the organization, that it often cannot carry out the line of the organization in action - the place where discipline is supposed to count.

Pseudo-Bolshevism

Today's leadership offers pseudo-bolshevism. It offers semi-helpful technical leadership - the National Secretary will tell comrades when to get up in the morning - but give no political leadership. Consequently, it is inevitable that the organizers must become hacks, and that the industrialized members will feel abandoned. It is inevitable that there is constant internal political crisis.

The Red Tide, surely one of the IS's most promising initiatives, is today becoming a caricature of the IS; steadily turning inward, burning out its leaders, exaggerating its strengths and importance, and tying itself down in bureaucratic structures - it is now a "democratic centralist, bolshevik combat youth organization" And it is expected to save the IS. Youth vanguardism, however, is just the last fig-leaf for the leadership, and if continued it will derail and destroy the Red Tide.

It all has to change.

THE WAY FORWARD

The way forward for the IS begins with facing facts. We are still a very small group. In relation to the population, we are equivalent to an organization of 75 members in Britain. The membership of the Canadian IS, in relation to its working class, is larger than the ISUS.

With so few forces, which include today only a tiny number of workers, and considering the objective conditions and the level of consciousness of the American working class, the IS must recognize that it is still a propaganda group. A propaganda group is an organization which must appeal to and attempt to recruit a small number of workers primarily on the basis of the whole range of its ideas--its revolutionary politics. It does not have the muscle, the weight (numbers and influence) in the working class to appeal to and recruit primarily on the basis of its agitation. The fact that many comrades supported the "turn to agitation" because they believed it would turn the organization outward, and because they had the best intentions, does not make the "turn" any less a mistake. We were wrong, and today we are paying dearly.

An Activist, Interventionist Organization

Accepting that we are a propaganda group, and realizing that we cannot by sheer will-power alone skip whole stages of development, does not mean, however, that we must return to the swampy past, to the commentary group. Today a propaganda group can and must relate its ideas to the real struggles of workers. The IS must become an activist, interventionist organization, one that aggressively pushes its politics and aggressively strives to recruit workers.

It must also be prepared to be bold and audacious, but also honest and realistic.

The truth is that we have done this before, before the "turn." Our intervention in the "March for Jobs" on April 26, 1975, in Washington, D.C. was such an intervention. It was an opening we could neither have planned nor foreseen--still we took advantage. U.S. Surge was similar. We came upon U.S. by accident. A few comrades organized a real movement, often in spite of the priorities of the IS. We are now involved in an organizing campaign at Snow Lion, a small non-priority shop in the Bay Area. We intervened in the independent left in 1974, and grew. We intervened in the women's movement--in action and with our ideas--in the Coalition of Labor Union Women and at the Cleveland working women's conference And we grew.

Had we followed through on the Portugal Solidarity Campaign, politically as well as organizationally, it could have been a success. The Southern Africa campaign has fantastic promise, but not if it follows the patterns set in the Attica support work and in the Free Gary Tyler campaign.

Plenty to Do

There is plenty to do, and it is really priorities and industrialization which blinds us to this elementary fact. The increasing narrowness and the rigidity of our priorities in the past year has now made it difficult for many members even to imagine any other strategy.

First of all, there is inside work. We will not abandon inside work, and the very idea is incredible. The most promising inside work is in the Teamsters union, where we have recruited a small number of workers and built real rank and file organizations. To fulfill this promise, however, we must have a healthy, politically cohesive organization--an organization which recruits in the Teamsters union and fights for clear class struggle politics in the rank and file movement--that is, for a self-reliant rank and file movement, independent of the Teamster bureaucracy, based on strong local groups and with a shop-floor orientation. The fact that the Detroit Teamster branch must for all intents and purposes be kept separate from the Detroit district is just one indication of the depth of our problem. The IS must change, for if it does not, those workers who now look to the IS, including those active in the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, will only be lost or, worse, politically ruined.

We also have inside work in steel, telephone, etc. But this work will only be successful if we can build our own base and build the IS. And there is no short-cut or substitute for this, certainly not trying to latch on to the Sadlowskis, Weissman and so on. The most important point is that we have the potential to do inside work in dozens of places. In hospitals, schools, on buses and in bakeries, but this cannot be done because of priorities, and because we lack the political confidence to just do it.

A strategy that says "nothing can be done" outside our priorities is very conservative indeed, and in practice it turns us away from potential inside work.

Outside Work

We must also do outside work, and there is nothing complicated or foreign about this. It does not mean that we will end up chasing every strike, although there is certainly nothing wrong with going after workers in struggle. We should do strike support work. We can sell Workers' Power on picket lines. We have already recruited workers in this way. Given our slim forces, we will have to do more and more outside work, but the point of outside work is to get inside work--to recruit workers to the IS.

We did this in the Postal campaign, a campaign which boosted the confidence of the IS, which built the circulation of Workers' Power, increased our working class political periphery, and which recruited to the IS. There were problems in the postal work, but it did not "depoliticize" and demoralize the organization. And Postal recruitment (6 worker members) was in the same league as Teamster recruitment. The fact that not all of these workers have stayed on is more related to the general problems of the IS (which has not held the great majority of its new worker members) than it is to the problems of postal work.

There is another great advantage to outside work, and that is that while we are small the working class and the class struggle are vast. American workers will fight, and it is the task of revolutionaries to relate to and build on that struggle wherever it exists. That is what revolutionaries have always done. But it can't be done if our members are tied down through industrialization and the EC's master plan.

Workers' Power

The key to turning the organization outward, to developing both useful propaganda and carrying out successful campaigns, is transforming Workers' Power and then using it. We will be writing another document soon on the necessity of developing a successful, interventionist workers' newspaper. But we already know that this can be done. We have seen what a good paper is like, because there are examples in our own tendency. Still it has to be emphasized now that Workers' Power has to become central to the IS in every sense, in every area of work. It cannot be put "on the back burner" every time there is a little action. Quite the contrary.

Workers' Power must lead politically. It cannot continue to tail agitational work. But it will never do this as long as it is aimed at a nonexistent "mass" audience, at the lowest common denominator. It has to be directed to (and written by, sold by, and read by) the advanced workers, those in struggle, those whom we want to recruit and those whom we want to bring into our periphery. Therefore, it will have to carry useful, interesting

materials, especially the reports of workers--first-hand accounts of their struggles. It must also carry the full range of our politics. And it will never be our central tool, a revolutionary, political workers' newspaper, as long as it has to compete in a losing battle for attention with industrialization and our "priorities."

WP and Democratic Centralism

Workers' Power can also take us in the direction of real democratic centralism, but only if it actually carries our politics, and only if the members actually sell the paper and defend its ideas. If comrades really use Workers' Power as their main tool in campaigns and interventions, with their contacts and friends, then the paper will be our best organizer. It will centralize and unify our work and our organization where it counts--in the world, in action. It will do what a Leninist paper is supposed to do.

Priorities Based on Real Struggles

To turn outward, to really turn to the working class, the IS must abandon its present priorities and industrialization as its strategy for building a revolutionary workers' party. It must turn to the actual struggles of the working class. The IS must develop local perspectives based on the actual conditions in each city and workplace.

This is not a retreat into federalism, and it is nothing new. As J. P. Cannon said, the Minneapolis Teamster campaign in the Thirties "...was not a preconceived plan worked out by the general staff of our movement." Farrell Dobbs documents this in Teamster Rebellion (p. 36-46). In 1933, Minneapolis was a backwater. The workers in the coal yards were hardly the most decisive section of the American working class. Local 574 was a very small union. It had only 75 members prior to the fall of 1933. But it happened that the President of the local, Bill Brown, was sympathetic to the Communist League. And the Communist League had a group of talented, experienced workers in Minneapolis. The Communist League made the coal yards a priority and then made the most of it.

Build Where We Can

Today is not 1933 or 1934. But the IS can still make use of that experience and that method. We must be prepared to intervene in small struggles, as well as large. Just as workers in the powerful unions sometimes have more confidence, so workers in the weaker sectors are often more directly confronted with the power and brutality of the state.

The IS must recruit and train a core of workers, and it must build where it can, whether it is in the backwaters or at the center. It cannot ignore or liquidate successful branches, even if they are far away from Detroit. There are workers today

who are interested in socialism, who are willing to join a revolutionary organization. They exist only in ones and twos. But they must be recruited all the same. And there is nothing outdated, discredited, or sectarian about focusing on these ones and twos. These workers, and their struggles, must become our priorities.

Optimism, Not Pessimism

Some people will say that this is a pessimistic perspective. But it is not. It is our present perspective, which says that workers are not interested in socialism, and which says that they can only be recruited to rank and filism, that is pessimistic and conservative.

We will be charged with wanting to go back to the books, but this too is false. We do believe, however, that politics and propaganda are important. We also agree with Lenin that without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice.

We may be charged with wanting to "return to the campuses" because we have mentioned students. But only former students will say this. We are not afraid of recruiting students to the IS. And we are not against relating to the independent left, nor to the movements of the oppressed--Native Americans, Latins, gays--and trying to recruit from them. If others are, it is only because they lack confidence in their own politics and commitment to the working class.

A healthy, outward-looking organization might actually recruit workers in more than ones and twos. And given half a chance, it would also recruit and find a role for those students, teachers, and white collar workers who are now ready and willing to join and help build a revolutionary workers' party based in industry. If in the past year each IS branch had recruited one or two workers, and held them, we would be larger today, not smaller, and our social composition would have been dramatically improved.

Change the IS

We are talking about changing the IS and we will have to do this as a result of struggle, branch by branch, fraction by fraction, and member by member. We will be charged with terrible crimes and there will be appeals to emotionalism. This should not frighten anyone, however, for we are also talking about changing the world. The IS as it is organized today has no future. The working class does. The center of our perspective is building the IS now, with what we have and where we are. The present leadership has no strategy for the IS as it exists. And it has no strategy for the long haul. It has only get-rich-quick schemes and false promises.

Now we must fight to maintain and develop the revolutionary traditions of the IS, of our international tendency, and of the working class. In this we can rely only on ourselves, and in the capacity of the working class to struggle. No one will do the job for us. Neither will we ever be "legitimate" in the United States, not as long as capitalism exists. We will always be "outlaws."

In conclusion, then, we remain committed to building an independent rank and file movement, and a revolutionary workers' party. We remain committed to real democracy, to women's liberation, and to the fundamental importance of the struggle for black liberation.

Finally, we reaffirm that there is no alternative to the most important of all Marxist ideas--"The emancipation of the working class will be the act of the working class itself."